# "THE GLOSS *of* YOUTH"

BY

HORACE HOWARD FURNESS, JR.

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# "THE GLOSS OF YOUTH"

# "THE GLOSS OF YOUTH"

AN IMAGINARY EPISODE IN THE
LIVES OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
AND JOHN FLETCHER

BY
HORACE HOWARD FURNESS, JR.

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
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BRYN MAWR, PENNSYLVANIA

## SONNET XXIX

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered, such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

FIRST PRODUCTION GIVEN AT
FRANKLIN INN CLUB
PHILADELPHIA
JANUARY 8TH, 1920

## CHARACTERS

Shakespeare

John Fletcher

Mistress Stephan Bellott

Nan Bellott, her Daughter, aged 9

Noll, aged 14

Jack, aged 10

# "THE GLOSS OF YOUTH"

TIME: APRIL 1615

SCENE: *A room in Shakespeare's house, Blackfriars. L. table with high-backed chairs at R. and back and plain oak stool at L. Several books on table, one a large folio open, also pages of MS. Pens in stand, and large metal ink pot. R. fireplace with andirons and logs; in front of fire high-backed arm-chair facing audience. At C. back an oak chest with purple mantle half out, a large felt hat on top; inside chest a plain gold crown and straight sword in scabbard.*

FLETCHER

[*Off R.*] Will, why such haste!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Off R.*] Let be! Let be!

*Shakespeare enters R., followed by Fletcher.*

FLETCHER

Nay but, Will, hear me!

SHAKESPEARE

Patience perforce is medicine, you know, for a mad dog. I cannot help *hearing* thee; calling so loud—

FLETCHER

Nay, then listen!

SHAKESPEARE

Not so; I am not in the vein to listen to thee, Jack, nor I will not—

FLETCHER

Will, you were not wont to treat me so. What hath come to thee that thou art ever in these doleful dumps? Where are thy merry gibes and all thy gamesome ways?

[*Shakespeare silently unties cords of cloak; throws it on chair by fireplace and seats himself at table L. Fletcher stands C. with hat and cloak still on.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Why then, Jack, this it is; I am sick at heart!

FLETCHER

Sick at heart! Thou? Art not still the idol of the public? [*Shakespeare makes a contemptuous gesture.*] The Globe is ne'er so crowded as when one of thy plays is toward—

SHAKESPEARE

Ay plays! Plays you may call them—but of my *work*, what then? The ignorant rabble care but for a comedy or a jig, and I care not for their praise of what any man may do as well as I. Two lovers in a forest—sugared lines—enough for the clown or the fool's zany to get abundance of laughter; or two or three wastrels in a drinking bout interrupted by a solemn ass and told to mend their ways. This is your comedy—look now what follows—thinkest thou that Othello, Macbeth, or distraught Lear could suffer all, and I not feel each pang of theirs? The child brought forth in tears and anguish is loved the more, for with its coming, comes surcease of pain—and joy is in such birth.

FLETCHER

[*Eagerly*] Will, art thou then at work upon another such as these? That news is good indeed.

SHAKESPEARE

Not I. But, Jack, it grieves me to the soul to find that what hath caused me joy in setting forth now falls on dull and unresponsive ears.

FLETCHER

'Twill not be ever thus. This play—or rather work—that we have now in hand will win them back.

SHAKESPEARE

Nay, Jack, my hand hath lost its cunning; *this* moves me not a whit [*lays hand on open folio*]. Dan Chaucer hath told the tale well, but it is naught but a tale at best. What was it you called this—play?

FLETCHER

"*The Two Noble Kinsmen*"—Let me see what thou hast writ—

[*Sits at table opposite to Shakespeare.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Ay! In good faith 'tis poor enough to suit the common cry of them—

[*Hands sheet of writing.*]

FLETCHER

[*Reads to himself, then aloud.*] "Let us leave the city, before we further sully our gloss of

youth." [*Pauses and softly repeats the last line.*]
"Our gloss of youth"—That's good—
"And to follow the common stream 'twould
bring us to an eddy
Where we should turn or drown; if labour
through
Our gain but life, and weakness"—
I do not rightly understand that last—

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, Jack, thou wouldst not—[*Bitterly*]. But for myself I will *not* follow the common stream and gain but life and weakness

[*Fletcher shakes his head sadly, then continues to read to himself. Shakespeare leans head on hand in moody silence.*]

FLETCHER

Tush, Will, this that follows is but idle stuff! It will not do at all. The lines are harsh, the words—

SHAKESPEARE

[*Slowly takes the paper from him and looking fixedly at Fletcher tears the sheet across and drops it on the floor.*]

I cannot, nor I will not write at *thy* behest.

FLETCHER

Here's a change indeed—'Twas not so in those far happier days when we together wrote turn and turn about on Henry VIII and Wolsey—Thou wert glad enough to have my praise or blame of any part—

SHAKESPEARE

Go then; choose another partner, for sooner than pen lines I cannot feel, this hand of mine shall wither. I will not write to please the rabble—if they no longer care for what is part of me—I care not a jot for any part of them. I told thee, Jack, I was sick at heart with all of this. Thou dost but chafe the sore instead of helping heal it. I prithee peace; I am not in the vein to talk with thee. [*Fletcher goes to side of table and seats himself upon it facing Shakespeare.*]

FLETCHER

Will—[*Shakespeare remains unmoved; head on hand looking down.*] Will—thou foolish one—All this talk of thine about the rabble—and the doltish public. Why, is it not their praise alone that thou does want? What! Want the praise and favour of fools? Cry for the thing that thou art all the while abusing? Thou foolish one!

[*He puts his arm on Shakespeare's shoulder.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Shaking his head and smiling slightly.*] Nay, Jack, 'tis not that I want the favour of fools; but I would the fools were better favoured—with wit and understanding.

FLETCHER

There, that is more like thyself. Come, shall we to work upon this next scene, thou shalt have all the *serious* parts. [*Seats himself at table and takes pen and paper.*] Where is the place here?

[*Pulls folio towards him. Shakespeare remains impassive. Enter R. Mistress Bellott and Nan, who carries a small basket. Shakespeare with a glad cry of welcome rises and greets Mistress Bellott with a kiss.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Mary, how kind of thee, and yet unkind to have left me thus alone so long.—Ah, my dear playfellow Nan, where hast been this many a day?

[*Nan clasps his arm, looking up into his face.*]

MISTRESS B.

Nay, Will, why hast *thou* left us so much alone? Have we offended thee? Stephan says that thou didst coldly pass him by but yesterday. Why art so changed of late?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Slowly and dully.*] Ay, Mary, I am changed, but 'tis because of change in others.

[*Fletcher has silently greeted them both, and resumed his writing. Mary acknowledges the greeting with a smile. Nan leaves Shakespeare, goes and kneels in chair at side of table, trying to make Fletcher stop; he playfully repulses her.*]

MARY

Master Fletcher, what means he by change in others? Sure *we* have done naught—

FLETCHER

Will, by your leave, let me but have a word with Mistress Bellott. I think I see a way to bring about a cure.

[*Mary seats herself in chair by fire. Fletcher crosses and stands facing her. They converse in dumb show.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Lifts Nan out of chair, seats himself and takes her on his knee.*] There: now tell me, thou rogue of the world—what hast been doing all thy days?

NAN

I have been making cakes for you.—See [*holds up basket*]. Marchpanes—and cut in hearts and crosses.

SHAKESPEARE

Thou clever one! and all for me. What payment for such sweet labour?

[*He takes cake and slowly eats it.*]

NAN

[*Shakes her head, breaks piece from cake in Shakespeare's hand; slowly munches it.*] Let's play at that game you taught me.—Secrets.

SHAKESPEARE

What game was that, sweetheart?

NAN

You know full well. We tell each other dreadful tales—whispering close—and then we say to what one only can the tale be told. You know that, don't you?

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, I had forgot.

NAN

I mind that once you told me about—what was it now?—I have forgot—and told me I could only tell it to the pump before our door.

[*Shakespeare is much entertained.*]

SHAKESPEARE

And didst thou?—I fear he was a leaky friend, and doubtless poured it out before thy back was turned.

NAN

I care not—'twas your secret, Master Will, and if he spouted it out to all the neighbors the fault was yours. I never liked him, for when I worked his wooden arm he splashed my new red shoes. But tell me now at once a pleasant tale, and then say who I am to tell it to. [*Shakespeare pauses, thinking, nods and softly whispers in Nan's ear. She gurgles with laughter and pounds him on the breast.*]

NAN

O, Master Will, Master Will, where *did* you hear a tale like that.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Finger on lips.*] Tut! And thou must only tell it to—Crab, thine old dog, who lies asleep before the fire.

NAN

[*Nodding head, smiling.*] Ay, Crab is safe—he'll never tell [*suddenly serious*]. But then poor Crab is very deaf; I fear I'll have to shout it in his ear, and someone else will surely hear me.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Solemnly.*] Nay, lift but his ear up gently and whisper. Crab will understand; tell him I told thee to tell him.

NAN

Ay, that I will [*she lovingly pats Shakespeare's cheek*]. And now I'll tell you—Oooh! *such* a tale—[*finger raised in warning*] and you must only tell it to—[*looks round, then points at table*] the ink pot there!

SHAKESPEARE

The ink pot! There's a choice indeed! He has set forth many secret thoughts of mine ere this. One more matters not.—Come, thy tale!

[*Nan endeavors to keep from laughing, then pulls down Shakespeare's head and whispers in his ear.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Staring with mock horror at her.*] O thou naughty one! Thou rogue of the world! Why—Why—

NAN

[*Finger on lips.*] No—No—! Tell him [*points to ink pot*].

SHAKESPEARE

Nay, I will tell thy Mother—Mary!
[*Mistress Bellott half turns.*]

NAN

[*Clapping her hand on his mouth.*] No, not Mother—the ink pot, the ink pot only, Master Will!

[*Shakespeare leans back and gazes at her, smiling and shaking his head.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*In a low whisper.*] Thy father and mother—
A kiss didst thou say?

[*Nan pounds him with one hand and with the other points at the ink pot, nodding. Shakespeare pulls it towards him and bending down, pretends to whisper into it. Nan is intensely interested.*]

NAN

[*Subsiding.*] I have something else to tell you, Master Will—

SHAKESPEARE

Nay, no more secrets. One such as that's as much as I can hold.—I dare not hear another.

NAN

'Tis *not* a secret. Two friends of mine have often asked me of you.—They long to see and speak with you. They are two very pleasant friends, one is named Noll and Jack's the younger one.—May they not come and see you?

SHAKESPEARE

Ay to be sure, when e'er thou wilt, sweetheart. I'm very sure thou hast told them rare tales of me, and of our tricks and sports—

NAN

No, Master Will, 'tis not for *that* they long to see you—'tis because you've writ such fine brave plays. They often speak of that—

SHAKESPEARE

[*His mood changing, he frowns slightly, then puts Nan off his knee, rising and speaking half to himself.*] Is it there also! My only audience now is but fools and children. [*Nan is bewildered at the sudden change and looks at him perplexed; she tries to take his hand.*] Nay, nay, go thy ways —go thy ways. [*He crosses to Fletcher and Mary. —Nan stands in doubt, then unperceived slips out door R. Mary rises and puts her arms round Shakespeare's shoulders.*]

MARY

Ah, Will—sweet Will, my dear, my honored friend—be not cast down by this that Master Fletcher tells me. Thou wert not wont to set such store by the voice of all the town.—Are not thy better plays set forth in print for all to read?

[*Fletcher stands left back.*]

FLETCHER

Ay, that's a point.—And many times too!

SHAKESPEARE

In print! I care not for those that only read.—My lines were meant to be sounded forth upon the stage! Ay, and they were too once, but now —well, no more of that.

[*Sits in chair by fire. Mary kneels beside him L. Fletcher stands on other side of chair, leaning over back. Shakespeare sits moodily gazing at fire—a slight pause.*]

FLETCHER

Will—Mistress Bellott and I here, have set a plan afoot.

MARY

Ay, Will, listen—'tis thought out for thee.

SHAKESPEARE

Well—

FLETCHER

'Tis this; if thou wilt but give consent to take up thy work on this our new play, why I will go and see those in charge of the playhouse and use my uttermost effort to have restored once more thy worthier works. The comedies to be banished for a time, and by and by thou shalt see the inconstant public turning once again thy way. Then, our new play finished, all shall be well again.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Smiling and shaking head.*] Ah, Jack, *this* woodcock is not to be caught by such a springe as that—

MARY

But wilt thou give him leave to try?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Tenderly stroking her hair.*] Mary, I can deny thee nothing.

MARY

And thou wilt write the parts in this new play.

SHAKESPEARE

Well, have it as thou wilt.

[*Mary signs to Fletcher and he goes out hastily.*]

MARY

Will, 'twas not alone for this I came to see thee. Thou hast ever been our good angel—and, O Will, things are very ill at home with us!

SHAKESPEARE

Again!

MARY

Ay, 'tis father and Stephan are again in trouble. Father declares that Stephan wrongs him, and that ancient lawsuit was adjudged wrong. He blames you too for all the part you played. He drove Stephan forth of the house and I have come to thee—

SHAKESPEARE

[*Rousing.*] By heaven this is too much! Mary when first I came to lodge with thy father and mother—thou wert then but a young and tender maid. I loved thee as a daughter—thou wert so near the age of my own Judith—my Judith—I saw the love grow 'twixt Stephan, thy father's young apprentice, and thyself—

MARY

And then when trouble came upon us, 'twas thy words and thy kind help that smoothed the way.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Half to himself.*] Did e'er the course of true love run smooth?

MARY

Father has ne'er forgiven Stephan and that is why that I am often sad.

SHAKESPEARE

He *shall* forgive him. Why should he bear that ancient grudge against him?

MARY

[*Suddenly starting up, and looking round room.*] Nan! Where is Nan?

SHAKESPEARE

She was here but even now. She cannot be far away. [*Calls.*] Nan, thou rogue of the world, where art thou!

[*Mary goes to door L. and looks in.*]

MARY

She is not there.—I must go at once, I fear she may have wandered to the river.

SHAKESPEARE

Tut! She is but hiding somewhere, or at home.

MARY

And thou wilt speak to father, Will? I must go.—

SHAKESPEARE

[*Tenderly taking her in his arms.*] Ay Mary, courage, dear heart, all will yet be well.

MARY

Farewell, thou hast comforted me much. [*She goes out.*]

[*Shakespeare sits at table L., picks up papers which Fletcher has been at work upon—reads slowly, frowning, looks at folio, turns pages, marking passages; then gathers book and papers together and slowly goes into room L. A short pause.—Nan rushes in R. She is followed more slowly by Noll and Jack. Noll is a stocky, somewhat heavy boy of 14, but bright intelligent face—He is dressed in brown suit and hat, plum colored stockings and light leather shoes. Jack is a direct contrast, auburn hair, pale complexion, dreamy and thoughtful. He is dressed in a black suit with white neck cloth and carries his cap. It is to be seen that Noll's love for Jack comes from*

*the fact that he has appointed himself his guardian. Jack's love for Noll comes from the lack in his own nature that Noll's supplies —physical strength. Nan likes Jack for his imaginative sense—she secretly loves Noll for his manliness.*]

NAN

Master Will, here are—Why where is he? He was here but a minute since with Mother.—No matter, boys, we'll wait. He can't be long away. [*Noll and Jack gaze silently at the room.*]

JACK

[*Going to table and picking up pen and book.*] Is this where he writes, Nan?

NAN

Ay, and plays tricks and sports with me too.—What are you about, Noll?

[*Noll has been examining contents of chest.—He pulls out tinsel gilt crown and holds it out.*]

NOLL

See here what I have found! I warrant this is the very crown I saw that player have on when he played Harry the Fifth; or was it Richard?

NAN

Let me see, let me see—[*Runs to chest; drags out large felt hat.*] Here's Romeo's hat—O—and here's a robe—[*Drags it out. Noll puts on crown, walks proudly to chair by fire, takes Shakespeare's cloak, wraps it round him and sits up very straight in chair.*]

NOLL

[*In a stilted style and without expression.*] "Here once again we sit, once again crowned, and looked upon I hope with cheerful eyes—But shall these last or we—[*Pauses trying to get words.*] But shall we wear these glories for a [*pauses*] day [*with a rush*] or will they last and we rejoice in them." [*Nan with felt hat on and dragging robe comes down and regards him with interest.*]

NOLL

Now, you must say "Long live they and forever may you last—"

NAN

Why?

NOLL

No you can't—I had forgot—girls are not let to play upon the stage.—Jack, come here and speak the line.

JACK

[*Reading in book at table.*] What—what line?

NAN

No—I *will* not say it neither—and Noll you have no right to touch Master Will's crown.—Give it me—

NOLL

No—that I will not; 'tis not thine—[*She attempts to seize it.—He pushes her and she slaps his face. He grabs her hand and restraining himself says.*] Thou little vixen, wert thou not a maid—I'd cuff thee soundly! [*Pulls the hat down over her eyes.—She hits out blindly, Noll laughs, lifts the hat and Nan smiles. He whispers to her, she nods. They go to chest at back. Jack at side of table picks up torn pieces and reads, half to himself.*]

JACK

"Let us leave the city—Before we sully our gloss of youth" [*pauses and smiles as though pleased, takes other piece*]. "If labour through our gain but life and weakness—" [*looks for other pieces. Shakespeare appears at door L. He stands unobserved, listening.*]

NOLL

Come, Jack, we are going to act a play.—I'm for Harry the Fifth [*seizes sword from chest and strikes attitude*]. "Once more into the—the hole, dear friends—or pile the—the—*it* up with our English dead!"

NAN

No—let's have Juliet and Romeo. I'll be Romeo—no, I'll be Juliet.

NOLL

I tell you, girls are not let to play upon the stage.

JACK

Nan can be one of those that sit and look—I speak for Hamlet—I'll be Hamlet—I am dressed in black—'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good Mother!

NAN

I want to be the Mother!

NOLL

No; I tell you!

JACK

Noll, you can be the King and wear that crown and robe.

NOLL

So long as I can be a King I care not.

NAN

Let's have a play with fairies in it, and all pretty things—

JACK

Those are but toys; and only fit for the groundlings—

NOLL

Yes, Jack, you're right.—The fine big things for my money—[*Shakespeare's face lights up with pleasure as he listens.*] I care not for your loves and doves and laughing Jacks.

NAN

Well, then I'll be one of those that sit and look on. [*Goes to back and comes walking mincingly.*] Ods my life, I'm going to the play—I dearly love a play—Ods bodikins, I crave permission to come in. [*She pulls chair round facing R. and sits.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Imitating Nan, walks in daintily.*] I crave permission too.—Ods my life, be the players ready?—I heard no trumpet sound—[*Nan jumps down from chair and seizes his hands.*]

NAN

Master Will, Master Will! These are the two I told you of.—This is Jack and that one's Noll—

[*Shakespeare sits in chair L. Nan on his right side puts her arm over his shoulder and softly pats him.*]

SHAKESPEARE

My lads, you are right welcome. I fear I have broke in upon a pleasant game.—Pray you proceed. [*To Noll.*] But tell me is Harry the Fifth thine only choice?

NOLL

No, Master Will; I dearly love another Harry play—Harry the Eighth—Father and I were at the Globe when it was last played.—You remember that time.

SHAKESPEARE

I am not like to forget that [*laughing*]. The Globe was burned to the ground. Is that the reason for thy choice?

NOLL

No, Master Will, it is [*hesitates*] because I love to hear my own name spoke out loud by the player, to all the people there.

SHAKESPEARE

Thine own name! Why my lad, there is none called Noll, or Oliver, in all that play. What mean'st thou?

NOLL

No not exactly *all* my name, but one there is who near the end says: "Cromwell, Cromwell, had I but served my King with half the zeal that I have served my God—"

SHAKESPEARE

'Tis the other way round I think; but those are Jack Fletcher's lines, do as thou likest with 'em. So thy name is Oliver Cromwell, eh? Thou art the son of the Putney brewer?

NOLL

He's not a brewer. He but owns a brewery.

SHAKESPEARE

I cry you mercy—I shall not forget. But if thou dost so like to hear thy name, why not choose *As You Like It*. There is I'm sure enough of Oliver in that.

NOLL

'Tis not as *I* like it, at all.—That's but a silly play.

SHAKESPEARE

I am of the opinion also. [*Pats him on shoulder; turns to Jack.*] And what is thy choice after *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*? By the same rule as Oliver's here, it should be Harry the Fourth, so that thou could'st hear the name of Jack—Falstaff—

JACK

My name's not Jack,—it's John—[*Noll produces apple from his pocket and slowly eats it throughout this dialogue.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Why, so it should be then *King John* thou'd choose.—What is thy other name, sweet lad?

JACK

My father's Mr. Milton, the rich scrivener.—*We* live in Bread Street—

SHAKESPEARE

Nan, thou hast chosen thy friends well. We shall never lack for food and drink; the one's father owns a brewery, the other's lives in Bread Street.

NAN

Jack said he wanted most to see you, Master Will, because you write such brave verses. He can make verses too; can't you, Jack?

JACK

I hear them in my head, and write them down.—I know not whether I make them or not.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Interested.*] What wilt thou be, Jack—I should say John—when thou art a man?

JACK

[*With faraway look in his eyes.*] A poet—

NOLL

A poet! Who told thee so?

JACK

No one—I know not how I know—but I *do* know.

[*Shakespeare looks at him fixedly, then silently clasps him in his arms, and says with deep emotion.*]

SHAKESPEARE

O, little brother, thou hast spoke truer words than thou perhaps may ever know. That inner voice's call must never pass unheeded—I know—I know! [*Turns to Noll with change of manner.*] And thou, Oliver, what is thy choice? What wilt thou be?

NOLL

A King!

NAN

[*Giving him a push.*]—A King! Who told thee so?

NOLL

My mother.—She says her father's father, and his father too, were of the very family as our noble King James.

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, that's true; that's very true.—I remember hearing thy mother's name was Steward.

NOLL

That's why I love your plays, Master Will, you speak so well of Kings and men who rule the state. I once played a King, 'twas when I was at school.

## "THE GLOSS OF YOUTH"

SHAKESPEARE

Didst thou so?—Come give us a taste of thy quality.—We're like, Nan, to see our play after all.

[*Noll hands his apple to Shakespeare to hold; then wraps cloak round him and with stilted gestures declaims without expression.*]

"This crown and robe
My brows and body circles and invests
How gallantly it fits me, sure the slave
Measured my head that wrought this coronet—
They lie who say complexions cannot change
My blood's ennobled, and I am transformed
Into the sacred temper of a *King*!"

SHAKESPEARE

Hold! Hold—[*Smiling.*] Noll, if thou wilt one day be a King, it will be but a sorry imitation.—Thou canst not even play it now. Speak the speech trippingly on the tongue—

JACK

[*Eagerly.*] Ay, that is what Prince Hamlet said to the player—

SHAKESPEARE

What sayst thou, Jack?

JACK

'Tis what you yourself made Hamlet say: "Speak the speech trippingly or I had as leave the town crier spoke my lines—" You remember that?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Smiling.*] Did I so?—But, lad, there have so many others spoke for me since Hamlet said his lines. [*Pauses in thought.*]

JACK

See, here it is—I have the book about me—

[*Pulls out tattered quarto of Hamlet and turns pages to find place.—Shakespeare takes it from him curiously; Jack shows him the place. He reads with interest, turning over a page.*]

SHAKESPEARE

By the mass! That's very good—that's very good.—That line I mind now cost me some concern—and that whole passage wrote itself I knew not how. And thou, my Jack, hast carried this about and read it oft?

JACK

I only saw it at the Globe once—my father likes not plays or players—but then I bought the book for sixpence, and so I now can have it all, as often as I wish.

[*Takes the book from Shakespeare and carefully puts it in his coat. Shakespeare is lost in thought.*]

NOLL

Master Will, write us another play all about Kings—with many speeches all about the crown and—and—

JACK

And full of lines that sound so fine, even when you say them to yourself, and only *think* you hear them—

SHAKESPEARE

Is *that* your chosen play? [*With animation.*] By the mass! And I will write at *thy* behest. But how like you that last one about the island full of fairies and hobgoblins?

NAN

Noll said fairies were but fit for the groundlings—

NOLL

I did *not* say that any part of Master Will's plays were but for the groundlings.—I stood among them once and they never knew good from bad.

JACK

There wasn't any bad if so be it was *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*—

SHAKESPEARE

Say'st thou so, truepenny!

JACK

There, that's what Hamlet said to his father. [*Shakespeare is beaming with pleasure—Enter Fletcher, R.*]

FLETCHER

Will, I fear I have failed.

[*Shakespeare looks puzzled and stares at Fletcher. Enter Mistress Bellott hurriedly.*]

MISTRESS B.

Nan, thou naughty one, what a fright hast thou given me—

## "THE GLOSS OF YOUTH"

SHAKESPEARE

The light of joy that she has brought to me must make amends, Mary.—What dost mean, Jack, that thou hast failed?

JACK

I—failed—I have not said so!

SHAKESPEARE

Nay, lad, I speak to Master Fletcher here.

FLETCHER

They at the Globe will not hear of any change. —The people are for comedies and such like shows. They care not for serious plays—

SHAKESPEARE

The people! Perdition seize the people! Here are three loving, loyal hearts shall outweigh the empty brains of a theatrefull of barren spectators —See—Nan, my rogue of the world [*takes her on his knee*]. Master John Milton—[*Jack kneels R.*] we poets know, eh, Jack?—And Master Oliver Cromwell—that shalt be King hereafter —[*Jack murmurs with a smile*—"Macbeth, Banquo."]

FLETCHER

What dost thou mean, Will?

MISTRESS B.

I do not understand!

SHAKESPEARE

Why look you—let the public have what it please.—The public! The present voice is naught! [*Clasps the children to him.*] Here's all my joy.—The Future—ay, the eternal voice is mine when it can speak, and wake response in hearts and souls like these!

[*Fletcher and Mistress B. still do not understand.—Shakespeare whispers in Nan's ear, she laughs.—Noll and Jack ask in dumb show what it is; Shakespeare is in animated talk with them as the curtain falls.*]

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